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A-ONE #1122   05/29/09

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->From the Editor's Keyboard   "Saying it like it is!"
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""

The calendar tells us that it's Spring - past Memorial Day, but you'd
never know it around here lately. Rain and cold has been the typical
weather for about a week now; and it's not fun! On the downside, I
haven't been able to get any work done outside; on the upside, I really
haven't had the time to enjoy it anyway. Or is that contradictory?!

Anyway, it's been another long and tiring week; and as usual, I'm home
late from work all this week so I haven't really had any time to consider
topics to write about, again. So, as I'm running out of time meeting my
weekly deadline, I'll just pass on putting together some comments for this
week - for good or bad (you can choose!). And just a preemptive warning
for next week - next week's issue will either be late on Friday night, or
some time Saturday morning due to my late work schedule for Friday night.

Until next time...

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                  Doom, Heretic and Hexen v 0.56

Patrice Mandin

All games:
- README list supported game data files.
- Added -iwad /pat/to/gamefile.wad command line parameter.

Doom:
- Fixed bug when saving game, was corrupting memory
  (Thanks to Sascha Uhlig for report and testing).

The ports are built with SDL 1.2 (svn 20090526) which have the following
things changed, compared to SDL 1.2.13:

- Xbios video driver disabled when FVDI present.
- Teamtap autodetection on joypad ports
  (Thanks to Fredifredo for teamtap and joypads).
- Xbios audio driver enabled for Magic
  (Thanks to Sascha Uhlig for testing).

Ports are available on my website.

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
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Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has passed, and we're
barreling headlong toward summer. It's not truly here in the northeast
yet, but it's coming.

I want to talk for a bit about the President's choice of a Supreme Court
nominee. A lot has been said and written about her, about her background
and about her comments. A lot of it is our friends in the G-No-P simply
opposing anything that the President presents. I know, I know, I'm
biased. But we all are.

Let's talk for a moment about what a Supreme Court Justice IS and what a
Supreme Court Justice DOES.

First of all, a Supreme Court Justice is not a judge. A judge interprets
the law as it applies to situations. A Justice interprets whether or not
a law conforms to the Constitution. In cases where a legal decision is
made, the law upon which a judge has based his or her decision can be
examined by the Supreme Court to decide if the law itself is
constitutional.

For this reason, a Supreme Court Justice need not be a judge. What's
important is not case law or past decisions, but an understanding of both
the letter and spirit of the Constitution and how a particular law may or
may not conform to it.

Now, Judge Sotomayor IS a judge. She's got more judicial experience than
anyone now sitting on the Supreme Court. That's not a bad thing; it's
simply the way it is.

Her supposed comment (and I'm paraphrasing here) that a minority woman
would make 'better' decisions than a white man has been taken completely
out of context, and truncated to boot. They completely missed what she
was saying, and intentionally so.

The conservatives contention that they 'need time to examine Judge
Sotomayor's record and opinions' is, to me, more babble. As far as I'm
concerned (and I wish the President would agree), they could have the
vote tomorrow. Let anyone in the Senate who wants to vote against seating
her on the Supreme Court. They will not be able to stop it, not even with

a filibuster. If they want to be obstructionist, let them do it.

Yes, it irks me that, when the conservatives held the House and Senate, they rode roughshod over just about everything... bullying legislation through, voting on bills in the middle of the night, adding last-minute amendments to bills and demanding an immediate vote...

Now that they're the minority party, they want to slow things down and make sure that their voices are heard just like they were still the bullying majority to make it 'fair' for themselves? I don't think so, Charlie Brown. Go ahead and vote to obstruct the process if you want to, but that's a big part of what lost you your majority in the first place.

My other complaint is about "my own" party. The democrats wasted two years as the majority in both houses of Congress, doing so little in that time that their approval rating was lower than the last President's. How's THAT for a low-water mark??

Even now, Congress is not moving at the pace it should. Other than moving to bail out the failed institutions that have, in large part, caused our current situation, they haven't done anywhere enough to get to the root of the problem.

The democrats seem to me to be afraid of doing anything to change the situation... afraid that whatever they do will come back to haunt them. They should take a lesson from the republicans in that area. The republicans have barreled in and done whatever the heck they've wanted, regardless of the consequences. True, they usually weasel and worm their way around so that it's everybody's fault but theirs, but the democrats don't have to adopt that part. Nor do they have to waste their time on things like placing or keeping the Ten Commandments on courthouse walls, passing laws to protect a single individual when existing law allows an alternative they find distasteful or redistricting states to give themselves an unearned advantage in the next election... all things that the republicans have done while in the majority. The democrats do need to start throwing some of their weight around though. The more they do, the more the conservatives will push back against it, and whether or not we as a country end up better off will decide who was right. But I would hope they spend their time on important projects: Health care, labor laws, lending guidelines, etc. THESE are things that we need to look at.

It seems that both parties have the attitude that the way to get in and stay in power is to 'advertise' like they're pitching snake oil, counting on emotion and fear instead of concrete ideas and actions.

And while I DO often refer to the more conservative of our two major parties as the G-No-P or as "the Republican'ts", it's also important that we remember that labels are just that: Either pro or anti tags that are intended to sway us in a particular direction. That's okay if you happen to agree with the positions of whichever side you gravitate to, but all too often the catch-phrase is the only thing we look at. Hey, if you've got a cool catch-phrase you don't NEED to know what lays beneath it, right?

Well, enough of that. Let's get on with the news, hints, tips and info available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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PPera posts this about a Hybrid TOS:

"I started recently a project which will likely take some time...
Disassembling TOS 1.04 and then doing some combinations and
modifications.

The disasm. of GEMDOS part is done. And I have already something useful:
'TOS 1.08', which is a hybrid of TOS 1.04 and 2.06. It offers some
benefits ....

More here with DL: http://ppera.07x.net/forum/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=19 "

Jo Even Skarstein asks PPera:

"Just one thing: If you chose 1.04 for compatibility reasons, why
change the version number? Won't this confuse some of the games/demos
you attempt to stay compatible with?"

PPera replies:

"I saw only a couple of games which check TOS version. And I did not
change the most relevant thing: GEMDOS version # . There is Trap #1 call
to get it, and a PRG will get the version of GEMDOS used in TOS 1.04
(0.15). The GEM version may be relevant for few games using AES (Deja Vu,
Sim City, Psion Chess... and I can't recall anymore), but I don't think
that they will check TOS #, but rather AES version with proper AES call.

Compatibility with majority of games means not following the rules
set by Atari (not always consistently). The problem is usually exactly
that programmers did not follow rules. Of course, the reason is in most of
the cases the intention to use as much RAM as possible in limited 512KB
machines. The other reason is speed. Then we have Timer C problem with TOS
2.06. I know about 6 games which work not in TOS 2.06 (and Falcon)
because of that, but there is for sure much more. It looks that in
this case Atari is the culprit. At least I did not see any mention that
stopping Timer C is not allowed when using system calls. Actually,
compatibility rises as we go to lower TOS versions, mostly
because of RAM usage. But TOS 1.02 and especially TOS 1.00 are not for
hard disk usage really. So, as best the choice we have 1.04.
In other words: most of games check nothing. They place code or data
in low RAM because it was OK with the TOS version that existed at that
time, and with running from floppy. By higher TOS versions we have
more low RAM allocated for the system, + hard disk drivers allocate low
RAM too, so a conflict is inevitable.

This 'hybrid' TOS actually does not solve the low RAM problem, because low
RAM usage is practically the same as by TOS 2.06.

But it is just first step, the result of disassembling. Next thing (on
what I'm working currently) will let whole low RAM free for games - but
will not work on 512KB machines, as we have to place GEMDOS's RAM
workspace (25KB + drivers, usually 40-50KB), somewhere..."

Gˆ¶tz Hoffart tells PPera:

"In my humble opinion, you should not call it TOS - it is not TOS and such a name will confuse things soon."

Ppera replies:

"Not TOS? OK - maybe I'll call it Windows 92 ? ... but Bill Gates will not like it. They forced Windows Commander to be renamed to TOStal Commander."

Gˆ¶tz explains his opinion:

"ATARI produced TOS. Patches to TOS were called e.g. KAOS. You're inserting version names of TOS and breaking up the order:
        - TOS 1.04 by Atari
        - TOS 1.06 by Atari
        - TOS 1.08 by you, but based on 1.04

That's confusing. Really."

'Jozsef' adds:

"It just confuses those who don't know that there was no official TOS 1.08.

By the way, I've just checked the so-called KaosTOS. In the about window it says: "TOS30". The patched TOS 2.06 (SuperTOS) reports itself completely the same as if it were Tos2.06. So I don't think there is a standard here. And the way you name the image file of the TOS or the link in the browser (Supertos fe. refers to" TOS2.06x.img"), is completely marginal question."

'PeP' adds his thoughts, and a good idea:

"The name "TOS" isn't yours to begin with. Call it ppTOS or whatever to avoid confusion."

Longtime Atari developer Guillaume Tello brings this to the conversation:

"Too bad that everyone talks about the name and not about the quality of his work.

Sure, a TOS without bugs and with some improvements would be cool for our machines. He can call it VISTA if he wants as long as his work is useful!

BTW, do you know my "little" work "COLORSTE" that brings color icons and color widows elements in ST Low? This could be added..."

Ppera replies:

"I think that you guys take all this too seriously. It is little too late for that. Only few people will use this 'creation'.

I did not change a single byte in TOS 1.04's GEMDOS part, and did not

change anything in GEM (AES, Desktop) part of TOS 2.06. I just combined
them. In theory it could be done in half hours, but because of address
conflicts I needed first to disassemble GEMDOS part of 1.04 together with
keyboard tables and system fonts (located after AES).

So, it is TOS. 100% TOS. It is just not official TOS. That's missing
from your comments Gˆ¶tz. Nothing is patched (yet).

For me it would be easy to call it PP, Putnik or whatever, for Atari
hacked OS. But I have in mind SW for detecting TOS version. I could leave
there 1.04 . But when someone will see desktop of 2.06 will be really
confused. So, I decided to put there something not present, something
between 2 numbers.

TOS version numbering should be for both GEMDOS and GEM, as I know.
There are separated version numbers for AES and GEMDOS. This is why I
bracketed it here, why I put smiley in thread in forum. Just a
compromiswise solution.

If someone has an idea how to achieve that SYSINFO will outprint my name
(instead of 'TOS') when it detects the running OS, let me know."

Jean-Luc Ceccoli tells PPera:

"I think this debate is kind of storm in a tea-cup...
You could name it whatever you want, letting it be detected as
actual TOS.

You didn't patch anything so far, but had to do some work in order
to mix the 2 versions. So, yes, it's still detected as TOS by other apps,
but no, it can be considered as non official TOS. Name it
whatever-you-want-TOS and go on with this great piece of
work, so everyone is happy."

Well folks, that's about it for this week. Tune in again next week, same
time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Videogames Get More Physical!
   """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   E3 Returning to Glitz?!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!
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Videogames Get More Physical as Recession Bites

With the recession cutting out some family vacations, gym memberships, and personal trainers, a rash of new videogames designed to let people workout in their living room are hitting the shelves.

Electronic Arts has just released "EA Sports Active" for the Nintendo Wii which comes with a resistance band and a leg strap that lets players perform aerobic activities like virtual roller blading, jogging, or lunging.

"With today's economy, people can't always afford gym memberships and personal trainers," said Alison Sweeney, host of NBC's "Biggest Loser" reality TV series.

"EA calls this game a "trainer in a box" and it really is. The game teaches you the right way to work out."

The game has a built-in journal to track food intake and encourage an active lifestyle, including away from the Wii.

The trend of incorporating exercise into virtual entertainment will be showcased at next week's E3 Expo in Los Angeles, the largest videogame trade show in North America.

Sega has a new Wii game, "Daisy Fuentes Pilates" hosted by the former MTV personality, Namco Bandai has "Active Life: Extreme Challenge" for Wii, and Nintendo has "Wii Sports Resort."

Activision's "Tony Hawk: Ride" for Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 adds physical play to the mix with a motion-sensor skateboard controller that translates gamers' physical moves into virtual tricks.

Exercise games have become an established genre for game publishers.

Konami Digital Entertainment introduced active games to the world with its "Dance Dance Revolution" game, which has sold over 11 million copies its 2001 launch.

Nintendo encouraged physical interaction with its Wii console and games like "Wii Sports" then took virtual exercise to another level last May with the "Wii Fit" which has sold over 14 million units worldwide, introducing gamers to yoga and mini-game workouts.

"Aside from the "Dance Dance Revolution" games, there have only been a handful of fitness games and, until the "Wii Fit" launched, none was particularly successful," said Michael Pachter, videogame analyst, Wedbush Morgan Securities.

He predicted strong sales for "EA Sports Active" and Sega's "Daisy Fuentes' Pilates."

Nintendo's Wii and "Wii Fit" have not only introduced more men to exercise but also paved a new avenue for female gamers.

"I've gotten e-mails from plenty of women who tell me that "Wii Fit" has helped them become more active, and it's clear that these women were not

gamers to begin with," said Kristin Kalning, game editor and columnist, MSNBC.

Daisy Fuentes, the Cuban-born actress and model, said her pilates games that will be released this summer isn't exclusive to women.

"Pilates is able to equally cater to both men and women, especially for beginners. Since it was developed by a man and for a man's body, it focuses on many important aspects of men's fitness," she said.

"I'm excited for everyone to have the chance to feel what it's really like to experience the true feeling of skateboarding," said Hawk in a statement.

Video Game Trade Show Seen Returning to Glitz

The interactive video game industry's biggest convention meets next week in Los Angeles promising a return to its glitzy past, but on the heels of weak sales and the slumping economy, the future of this fun and games business is no laughing matter.

A wave of fitness games, an expanded lineup for Nintendo Co Ltd's popular Wii console and, possibly, hardware price cuts, are all expected to be major themes at the Electronic Entertainment Expo, or E3, which starts on June 2 in Los Angeles.

To be sure, the industry is doing well, even as the economy shrinks and unemployment in the United States swells. Hudson Square Research analyst Daniel Ernst pegged video game sales for the fiscal year ending in March at $28.7 billion, up 13 percent, and bigger than the $27 billion movie business.

The challenge is to keep growing as consumers think twice about discretionary spending, particularly on game consoles that cost up to $500 and top games priced at about $60.

April U.S. sales of video games fell 17 percent, after sliding 23 percent in March, according to research group NPD. The decline is somewhat skewed by a tough comparison, since two of the biggest games of 2008 were launched at the same time one year ago.

Still, the economy is impossible to ignore. One analyst suggests that a long rumored price cut for Sony Corp's PlayStation 3 console, currently selling for more than $400, could fuel a new wave of demand.

"The thing that would really boost the industry in this traditionally slow period would be a Sony price cut. That would really help right now," said Billy Pidgeon, an independent analyst at Game Changer Research.

But don't cry for the industry, whose global sales -- including hardware -- could top $98 billion this year and $110 billion in 2010.

"If it doesn't happen, I don't think the industry is in for rough times," Pidgeon added. "I do see that, in the fourth quarter, there will be a return to form."

In addition to a host of new video games from the likes of Electronic

Arts Inc, Activision Blizzard Inc, and Take-Two Interactive Software Inc, the crowd of 40,000 game enthusiasts are expected to see an updated portable game player - call "PSP GO" - from Sony, and an accessory for Microsoft Corp's Xbox 360 that senses motion similar to remotes made for Nintendo's Wii remotes.

Nintendo, whose Wii console has sold more than 50 million units and dominated the market in recent years, is likely to unveil a new versions of its own bankable franchises, including Zelda, and Wii Fit, as well as more games from third-party developers, and a new peripheral.

Overshadowing the announcements may be a renewed thrust by the show's organizers to "return the show to its formerly large scale in an attempt to regain the spectacle, glamour and glitz from prior E3 events," Wedbush analyst Michael Pachter said.

The show, which once drew crowds estimated as big as 80,000, downsized to about 5,000 in the last two year, seeking a less stressful, more personal focus with industry insiders. The idea was a bust.

"E3 used to be a great event (that) helped to push the games to a more mass market audience," said Yves Guillemot, chief executive of France's Ubisoft Entertainment SA, maker of the hit franchises "Assassin's Creed" and "Splinter Cell."

"In the last two or three years it was almost a nonevent," he said. "We think it will be a major event - the show has to be big. We want to attract more and more talent from all the other industries (so) they can see what is happening now."

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Obama To Release Cyber Security Report on Friday

President Barack Obama is to release the results of a 60-day review of US cyber security policy on Friday, White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said Tuesday.

"The report is an important first step towards securing our nation's cyber infrastructure," Gibbs told reporters.

"The administration recognizes the very serious threats public- and private-sector networks face from cyber crime and cyber attack," he said.

"Recognizing these threats, the president has elevated cyber security to a major administration priority."

The 60-day review of US cyber security policy was carried out by Melissa Hathaway, a former Bush administration official who has been serving as

the interim White House cyber security adviser.

No single US agency is currently charged with ensuring government cyber security and lawmakers have called for creating a powerful national cyber security advisor reporting directly to the president.

Plans to reorganize the US government's approach to IT security come amid a growing threat of cyber spying and attacks, including reported breaches of the US electricity grid and the F-35 fighter jet program.

Cyber security was subject to fierce turf battles under the previous administration between the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the super-secret National Security Agency (NSA).

A top DHS cyber security official quit in March, complaining that DHS had been sidelined and US cyber protection efforts were being dominated by the NSA.

Gibbs said the administration was "committed to establishing the proper structure within the government to ensure cyber security issues continue to receive top-level attention and enhanced coordination."

The Washington Post reported on Tuesday that Obama planned to create a post of "cyber czar" but "discussions were continuing as to what rank and title the adviser would have."

The cyber chief would be a senior White House official with "broad authority to develop strategy to protect the nation's government-run and private computer networks," it said.

PROMISES, PROMISES: Battling Cyber Turf Wars

The digital battlefield is proving to be difficult terrain for President Barack Obama.

As he unveiled his plan Friday to make the nation's computer networks more secure, he fulfilled a campaign pledge to make cybersecurity a top priority. But he fell short on another promise to create a cyber adviser "who will report directly to me."

Ten months ago, candidate Obama told a Purdue University audience that he "will make cyber security the top priority that it should be in the 21st century." He went on to pledge that he would coordinate efforts across government, implement a national policy, tighten standards to make information more secure, and bring together government, industry and academia "to determine the best ways to guard the infrastructure that supports our power."

On Friday, Obama took the first step toward making that far-reaching promise a reality. But it remains unclear whether the structure he is creating will be capable and powerful enough to take on an enduring and monumental task.

The key will be how much authority the so-called coordinator will wield.

Obama said Friday he will personally choose his new cyber coordinator, and that person will have "regular access" to the Oval Office.

But the White House has yet to apply a formal title to the post and specify the coordinator's line and level of authority within the complex government structure.

Access is everything in Washington. Those who have the president's ear have the power to make things happen. Without a title and clear lines of authority, it's hard to say how much power and access the new cyber czar will have.

Turf wars between powerful federal departments, including intelligence agencies, the Pentagon and Homeland Security , have also long mired efforts to better coordinate, control and fund the nation's cyber security. Agencies do not want to cede authority to make decisions about what software or hardware they use, how they protect their networks or what new technologies they will research or pursue.

In the six weeks since the White House cyber review was completed, officials in and out of the White House have wrangled over exactly how much power should be invested in the new coordinator position. The lack of detail in Obama's announcement suggests the debate - and uncertainty - continues.

The goals laid out in Obama's announcement largely mirror his Purdue promise, and they reflect a growing realization that the U.S. is not adequately prepared for a serious cyber attack.

Obama's description of the cyber job was broad, and spoke of "working closely" with federal budget decision-makers, and "coordinating" with other agencies in the event of an attack. He also said the cyber czar will be a staff member of both the National Security Council and the National Economic Council - adding what could be a complicated dual layer of responsibility.

White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said the new cyber coordinator would have a strong role. Asked directly about the extent of the cyber czar's authority, Gibbs said the president "isn't looking to hire somebody and dump them somewhere."

As experts have repeatedly noted in recent weeks, more than 80 percent of the nation's digital infrastructure is owned or controlled by the private sector.

"At the end of the day, you actually need a more senior-level person to work with the senior principals within the administration," said Tiffany Jones, director of government relations for Symantec. She added that the same is true in order to work with high-level industry executives.

One possible comparison is Obama's appointment of Carol Browner as director of the White House Office of Energy and Climate Change. The selection of Browner, a former Environmental Protection Agency administrator, carried weight due to her status in the field. But it also set up competing leaders of complex energy issues.

If Obama snags a high-profile, well-respected cyber expert to take on this job, it will send a strong signal about the person's authority and expected changes ahead. If not, it may only further entangle the bureaucracy and make real change far more difficult.

'New Arms Race' Taking Shape in Cyberspace

A "new arms race" is taking shape in cyberspace, Canada's security czar said Wednesday, lamenting ever bolder and more sophisticated attacks on government websites by Russia, China and others.

"I really look at this area almost as the new arms race," said Canadian Public Safety Minister Peter Van Loan.

Cyber security is "a concern both countries share," he told a joint press conference with US Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, in Canada to discuss border and other security concerns.

Russia and China "have proven to be adept operators in that area, and they are not the only ones," Van Loan said. "There are a lot of private individuals and other interests that are threatening our security in that regard too."

Cyber attacks occur daily, he added.

Both officials said reviews of existing cyber defenses are ongoing.

More Than 90 Percent of E-Mail is Spam

If a new spam report from Symantec's MessageLabs is surprising, you probably haven't checked your inbox recently.

About 90.4 percent of all e-mail is spam, an increase of 5 percent from last month, MessageLabs said Tuesday. That means one out of every 1.1 e-mails is a spam message.

What caused the spike? Webmail, social networking sites, and botnets are just a few of the culprits, the company said.

Webmail and social networking profiles are "goldmines for spammers," according to MessageLabs. "All spammers use is a subject line and a valid hyperlink to active profiles on one of a number of major social networking sites. These e-mails originate from legitimate addresses on some of the main webmail providers making them harder to catch by regular anti-spam filters."

Spammers are also taking advantage of social networks via tools that crack the automated CAPTCHA terms users must type in before setting up accounts.

Spammers are most active during the U.S. workday, MessageLabs found, suggesting that active spammers are either based in this country or find the U.S. workforce the most attractive targets.

"A new harder to crack CAPTCHA technology is on the horizon and spammers want to maximize their profits before this new breed of CAPTCHAs are let loose as a deterrent to spammers and phishers," according to MessageLabs.

Meanwhile, about 57.6 percent of spam was sent via botnets. The most active botnet, known as Donbot, sent 18.2 percent of spam and is most

active in Asia. Two botnets, known as Rustock and Bagle, meanwhile, are most active in the Americas and make up 20 percent of spam. In the rest of the world, there are the Cutwail and Xarvester botnets, which account for 10 percent of spam.

In related news, the White House announced Tuesday that it will release its 60-day Cyberspace Policy Review on Friday.

"The administration recognizes the very serious threats public and private sector networks face from cybercrime and cyberattack," press secretary Robert Gibbs said during a press briefing. "Recognizing these threats the President has elevated cybersecurity to a major administration priority, undertaking the early comprehensive interagency review."

"The report is an important first step towards securing our nation's cyber infrastructure," Gibbs concluded.

FBI E-mail Clobbered After Virus

A virus has reportedly disrupted Web-based e-mail services at the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The FBI confirmed Friday that it had been forced to shut down its Internet-facing unclassified network, but disputed a report that the incident had left the agency unable to e-mail counterparts in other intelligence and law enforcement agencies. "The external, unclassified network was shut down by the FBI as a precautionary measure," the FBI said in a statement. "Within 48 hours of identifying the issue and mitigating risks, e-mail traffic was largely restored to the external, unclassified network."

FBI agents can send e-mail on the agency's more secure internal network or via BlackBerry, but many use this unclassified network to send messages via a Web-based e-mail system, said a source familiar with the situation. That webmail service was down throughout the week and continued to be unavailable for some users, the source said.

"We can e-mail to anyone ... and [we] have Internet access. We also have a secure e-mail system that connects all 400+ offices around the country and 60 offices overseas," FBI spokesman Paul Bresson said in an e-mail message.

The FBI did not provide details on the security incident, but it looks as though hackers may have used maliciously encoded file attachments to hack into the network. In its statement, the FBI said it was now blocking users from sending or receiving attachments on the unclassified network "to give our technicians time to scan all the attachments that came into the e-mail system to make sure we have identified and mitigated all threats to the network."

Malicious attachments are a constant security threat for computer users.

Microsoft warned Thursday that attackers are sending malicious QuickTime media files to victims, exploiting an unpatched flaw in Apple's media format, in order to install malicious software on Windows systems.

News of the FBI's webmail outage was first reported Friday by the New York Post, although other news outlets had reported last week that the FBI had been hit by the same virus that felled Windows systems within the U.S. Marshals.

Yahoo Open to Microsoft Deal Under Right Terms

Yahoo Inc.'s chief executive said Wednesday that she is open to joining forces with Microsoft Corp. so both companies can better compete in Internet search, but a deal would need a specific set of terms - including "boatloads of money."

An alliance in Internet search would have to enrich Yahoo, give Yahoo access to the "right data" and bring strong technology, Carol Bartz said at The Wall Street Journal's D: All Things Digital conference. In the past, Yahoo has insisted it needs data culled from search requests to sell the most effective ads and tailor other services to suit its users' interests.

Asked if she would consider selling all of Yahoo, she said, "Oh, they'd have to have BIG boatloads of money."

Yahoo already has walked away from what would seem to be a boatload. Microsoft offered as much as $47.5 billion for the company last year. Jerry Yang's, Yahoo's co-founder, was chief executive at the time and saw Yahoo lose two-thirds of its market value after rejecting Microsoft. He stepped down in November and was replaced in January by Bartz, who came from Autodesk Inc. Yahoo's market value now stands at $21 billion, with its shares falling 34 cents to $14.94 Wednesday.

Microsoft Corp. CEO Steve Ballmer, who appears at the conference Thursday and is widely expected to talk about his company's new search engine, has said he would still be interested in a search-related deal with Yahoo that could help them threaten Google Inc.'s leadership.

Bartz was asked whether Yahoo continues to talk with Microsoft.

"Yeah, a little bit," she said.

Bartz said it would be unfair to shareholders to rule out selling the company and she needled the founders of privately held Twitter Inc. for saying Tuesday that they intended to keep the young, rapidly growing online communication service independent.

"Never's a long time," she said.

Bartz, 60, recounted how she deflected overtures from Yang in November to take his job when they met at board meeting of networking equipment maker Cisco Systems Inc., where they serve as directors. A month later, she agreed to visit Yang's home.

Bartz was taken aback when Yang pulled an organizational chart from a closet and started drawing arrows when asked how strategic decisions were made.

"It was like a Dilbert cartoon, it was very odd," Bartz said. "I was like, 'Oh, my God. You need management.'"

Blake Jorgensen, Yahoo's chief financial officer, plans to leave the Sunnyvale, Calif.-based company as soon as Bartz finds a replacement. But it doesn't sound like Bartz wants to replace Susan Decker, who had been president of Yahoo before leaving the company after Bartz beat her out for the top job.

"I don't need a No. 2 because I don't want to be removed from the business," Bartz said. "That's what happens. You get confused about who's in charge."

Time Warner To Spin Off AOL, Ending Ill-fated Deal

When AOL flashed $147 billion in stock puffed up by the dot-com boom, Time Warner, one of the world's biggest media companies, fell into its arms in 2001. They swooned over their combination of Internet access and traditional media.

But before long, reality intruded. People were saying the marriage wouldn't last. Finally, after years of denial, Time Warner filed for the corporate world's version of a divorce Thursday. It said it will spin out AOL as a separate company and get on with its life as a movie, TV and publishing conglomerate.

Now AOL will try to bounce back even as its once-ubiquitous dial-up Internet access business fades away and its online advertising business struggles to pick up the slack.

The fix-it challenge falls to former Google Inc. advertising executive Tim Armstrong, 38, who was hired as AOL CEO in March to try to restore the luster to a brand once known as America Online.

Time Warner owns 95 percent of AOL and will buy out Google's 5 percent stake during the third quarter for an undisclosed amount. From there, AOL and its 7,000 employees will be spun off into a separate publicly traded company around the end of the year.

"For AOL, becoming a standalone company will give it more focus and strategic flexibility," Time Warner's chief executive, Jeff Bewkes, said at Time Warner's annual shareholder meeting Thursday in New York.

Meanwhile, Time Warner will focus on movies, cable TV networks such as HBO and CNN, and publishing magazines such as Time, People and Sports Illustrated.

AOL once defined the Web for millions of people. But much of its original revenue came from providing dial-up access, a business that peaked for AOL in 2002 at 26.7 million subscribers, back when the company stuffed free trial CDs in magazines and mailboxes. The march of broadband ate away at the business, and AOL had just 6.3 million dial-up subscribers at the end of the last quarter.

The decline undercut the premise that the content created by Time Warner's media empire would become even more valuable as AOL plumbed it to expand its Internet audience.

Even after AOL broadened its reach by giving away content and running

free, ad-supported sites, that didn't create many new opportunities for Time Warner. Bewkes acknowledged last month that AOL helped promote material such as Warner Bros. movies or TNT television shows, but didn't bring in new revenue for the content. That function can be served just as well by Web portals the company doesn't own, like Yahoo or MSN.

It's no wonder that AOL Time Warner quickly disintegrated into one of the worst corporate combinations in history. In 2002 and 2003, Time Warner absorbed nearly $100 billion in charges to account for the rapidly diminishing value of the combined company. Time Warner even dropped AOL from its corporate name. Today, the combined value of AOL, Time Warner and Time Warner's recently spun off cable business totals around $40 billion.

At AOL in particular, the falloff has been stark. When Google agreed to pay $1 billion for its 5 percent stake in late 2005, the investment pegged AOL's market value at $20 billion. This past January, Google estimated its investment had plunged by more than 70 percent, leaving AOL with a market value of about $5.5 billion.

Today AOL gives away most of its services, like e-mail, to drive traffic to its ad-supported Web sites. But after a few strong quarters, ad growth slowed and then began declining. AOL also has Platform-A, a business that places ads on sites all over the Web, not just ones run by AOL. Yet that reach hasn't mattered enough: Both Yahoo Inc. and Google mine bigger profits from their ad businesses.

Although AOL's operations make money, its operating profit of $150 million in the first quarter marked a 47 percent drop from the same period in 2008.

Meanwhile, AOL's Web sites, which include celebrity gossip site TMZ and tech blog Engadget, averaged 106 million unique U.S. visitors each month during the first quarter, according to comScore Media Metrix - a drop from 110 million visitors in the first three months of 2008. The top three Web companies all posted gains in traffic in that same period: Google, Yahoo and Microsoft Corp.

Frederick Moran, an analyst at The Benchmark Co., said investors and Time Warner shareholders will be pleased by the spinoff news because AOL has acted "almost like an anchor" on Time Warner's stock over the last few years.

Time Warner also recently spun out Time Warner Cable, which provides cable TV and broadband Internet access. Since then, Time Warner Cable's stock has risen 26 percent - but Time Warner shares have been essentially flat.

Ted Leonsis, an executive who retired from AOL in late 2006, said the decision to spin off AOL emphasizes a shift from seeking size and scale - two attributes that were in vogue 10 years ago - to a focus on being nimble and innovative.

"I'm thrilled for the employees and I don't see any other plan, so while it's a great decision it was an inevitable decision," he said.

Former Time Warner CEO Gerald Levin, who was instrumental in AOL's takeover, recently declined to comment about the looming breakup. Levin now works as director of a rehabilitation center in Southern California.

AOL co-founder Steve Case, the other main architect of the 2001 deal and the founder and CEO of investment company Revolution LLC, wrote Thursday on the short-messaging site Twitter that he is glad to see AOL set loose. He said it "has been a long, tortuous journey" and now is "time to open a new chapter."

Google Hoping Web Surfers Will Ride Its 'Wave'

Google Inc. is hatching a new species of e-mail and instant messaging, but the Internet search leader first wants the hybrid service to evolve even more with the help of independent computer programmers.

The free tool, called "Google Wave," runs in a Web browser and combines elements of e-mail, instant messaging, wikis and photo sharing in an effort to make online communication more dynamic. Google hopes Wave simplifies the way people collaborate on projects or exchange opinions about specific topics.

Google offered the first glimpse of its latest offering Thursday during the Mountain View, Calif.-based company's annual conference for software developers who build programs on top of its services. The rest of the Web-surfing public won't be able to hop on Google Wave until later in the year.

By the time Wave rolls out for everyone, Google hopes independent programmers will have found new ways to use the service.

Among other things, Google is counting on outsiders to figure out how to weave Wave into the popular Internet communications service Twitter, social networks like Facebook and existing Web-based e-mail services, said Lars Rasmussen, a Google engineering manager.

Rasmussen and his brother, Jens, helped build Google's online mapping service, which sprouted a variety of unforeseen uses after its 2005 debut because of the ingenuity of external programmers.

Having learned their lesson from the mapping experience, the Rasmussens wanted to give developers ample time to tinker with their newest creation before unleashing it on the rest of the world.

The Rasmussens broke away from Google's mapping service in 2006 to concentrate on building a service that would enable e-mail and instant messaging to embrace the Web's increasingly social nature. They contend e-mail hasn't changed that much since its invention during the 1960s.

"We started out by saying to ourselves, 'What might e-mail look like if it had been invented today?'" said Lars Rasmussen, who worked on Wave in Australia with his brother and just three other Google employees.

Wave is designed to make it easier to converse over e-mail by providing tools to highlight particular parts of the written conversation. In instant messages, participants can see what everyone else is writing as they type, unless they choose a privacy control. Photos and other online applications known as "widgets" also can be transplanted into the service.

The service could easily accommodate advertising like Google's 5-year-old e-mail service already does, but Lars Rasmussen said it's

still too early to predict how the company might profit from Wave.

Microsoft Picks Bing as Name for New Search Engine

Microsoft has picked Bing as the branding for its new search engine, putting to rest months of speculation of what the next iteration of Live Search would be called.

Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer revealed Bing at the D7 conference in California Thursday; the company said it will roll out the product over the next several days until it is fully available to everyone on Wednesday.

Bing and Kumo were the names the company was considering for the new search engine, but in recent days speculation grew that Bing was the front-runner. Microsoft confirmed earlier this year it was testing a search engine called Kumo, a Japanese word that can mean "cloud," internally, but the company never confirmed the official name for its new engine.

Highlights from an interview with Ballmer at D7 are posted on the conference Web site. Microsoft also demonstrated the new search engine at the conference.

Microsoft said it has designed Bing as a "decision engine" to help people search the Web more intelligently and to simplify everyday tasks such as getting directions, and said the tool is aimed at giving people more ways to organize search results to their preferences.

For example, Bing includes a set of navigation and search tools called an Explore Pane on the left side of the page that offers a feature called Web Groups, which organizes search results not only in the pane but also in the actual results generated on the page.

Microsoft also has added Related Searches and Quick Tabs features, which provide a table of contents for different categories of search results.

Bing also helps people find what the engine considers the most relevant results by highlighting them in various ways, according to Microsoft. A feature called Best Match surfaces what the engine considers the best result for a search query and calls it out for the user. Another feature called Deep Links gives people more insight into what resources a site offers.

Bing also offers what is called Quick Preview, which gives a brief preview of search results in a box that appears when someone mouses over the search results link. The preview gives a snapshot of the information the link provides so people can decide whether they want to click on it.

Bing also includes one-click access to information through an Instant Answers feature. Microsoft said it designed this to help users find information quickly within the body of a search page so they do not have to use additional clicks to get what they are looking for.

Microsoft has redesigned its search engine in the hopes of closing the gap with Google, which has the lion's share of the search queries. It's also been reported that the company is spending US$80 million to $100

million to promote Bing. Google currently has about 80 percent share of all online searches to Microsoft's 6 percent, according to most analysts, who have said that it will take revolutionary features for people to switch from Google to another search engine.

People can find out more about Bing and give it a test run online.

HTML5 Could Be the OS Killer

For companies that compete with Microsoft, HTML5 is almost the Holy Grail, offering the ability to run applications regardless of the underlying operating system. While the browser isn't more important than operating system today, Google this week firmly suggested it is only a matter of time.

We've heard that story before. Java was supposed to raise apps above the level of the operating system, offering cross-platform "write once, run everywhere" applications that would break the coupling between an application and a specific operating system. Proponents predicted Windows would become less important with the rise of Java apps.

While Java has accomplished a great deal, it's potential as an OS-killer has not been realized. HTML5 has a better shot.

At its developer conference this week, Google demonstrated HTML5 applications support inside future versions of its Chrome browser and the future Android 2.0 operating system. Mozilla executives also promised HTML5 support inside the forthcoming Firefox 3.5 browser.

Google demonstrated how HTML5 allows tighter integration of browsers and applications, such as its Google Web Elements. Developers will be able to add applications to web sites by adding only a few lines of HTML5 code, much as they already do with Google Web Elements.

Microsoft, meanwhile, has announced plans to support HTML5, but appears to be keeping it as arm's length, at least for now.

What does this mean for users?

HTML5 is a standard that is still being developed and is likely to remain so for several years. Its focus on running applications within the browser is an important driver of interest in cloud computing, where applications live somewhere off on the Internet and are delivered by the browser.

The focus of future browsers will shift from "going places" to "doing things." This will be a boon to free operating systems, which will increasingly be able to hide themselves under the browser user interface. While Windows and Mac OSX won't go away overnight, the pressure on them will be to innovate beyond the browser, perhaps through a common set of extensions for HTML5 applications to use.

It is too early to start betting against desktop operating systems from the major vendors. However, it is clear their role and importance is likely to change - and probably diminish - as browsers become dominant in users' lives.

Microsoft to Netbooks: Stay Tiny Or Pay the Price

Microsoft appears to have decided that any netbook with more than 10.2-inch screen isn't really a netbook at all, and should pay more for a copy of Windows 7. This is Redmond's version of the question facing the hardware companies themselves: How to maximize netbook sales without cannibalizing sales of laptops.

Answer: You can't, though Microsoft's pricing could force up prices on new, larger-screen netbooks. It could also land the company back in court.

The net is rife with rumors that Microsoft will establish a "maximum specification" after which netbooks will pay more for a copy of Windows 7. All of these trackback to a site called TechArp, which claims to have access to the new specs. Microsoft itself isn't talking, though the specs look legit.

The big difference between supposed specs and the maximums for Windows XP and Vista netbook pricing is that with the older operating systems a netbook can have up to a 12.1-inch screen. That seems quite reasonable. The new 10.2-inch Windows 7 limitation would make anything larger a laptop, regardless of how the marketplace or potential customers see them.

As someone interested in purchasing the new 11.6-inch Acer netbook, I will admit it is intended as a laptop replacement. But, only for a Windows laptop I wouldn't otherwise replace. My old Dell is nearing the end of its long life and I need a machine for some simple, low-tech tasks related to my volunteer work.

Give me the right machine for the right price and I will buy. Otherwise, I will just use a Mac notebook that I already own and be done with it.

Unlike those with pencil-thin fingers, I need the larger keyboard that goes along with the 11.6-inch screen. A 10-inch screen just isn't very useable for me.

I am willing to spend $350 on such a laptop, but I am price-sensitive, especially in this economy. If Microsoft increasing the OS cost were to raise the cost of the machine to $399, I'd be out of the market.

Microsoft needs to be very careful that its attempts to keep netbooks from lowering its laptop revenue don't end up costing it price-sensitive customers./David Coursey knows a laptop when he sees one. Follow him on Twitter and send e-mail to him via www.coursey.com/contact.

Bloggers Want to Make You Pay (And You Eventually May)

As the advertising ice age continues killing off media dinosaurs, GigaOm's announcement of a plan to charge $79 a year for premium blog content again raises the issue: Is anybody actually willing to pay?

Taken another way: How much media has to die before users are willing to pay for what's left?

With online ad revenue at the four top portals down 3.3 percent during the first quarter, according to eMarketer, publishers are scrambling for new revenue sources. Whether they will find them is a huge question for readers and publishers alike.

Charging for content seems so easy. Take your best stuff and attach a price tag to it.

Rupert Murdoch, whose Wall Street Journal is one of a handful of sites successfully charging for content, has promised users "will pay handsomely" to get WSJ content on their iPhones.

Other sites, including the New York Times, have backed away from some paid content they previously offered.

Today, it takes incredible confidence to go to a mostly-paid content model, such as the one used by the WSJ. Half-hearted attempts, such as those at the NYT, have failed.

Online publishers should prepare themselves for a massive shift toward paid content, a concurrent emphasis on protecting their content from poaching by free sites, and plan for battling those sites that remain free in hopes of grabbing people unwilling to pay for their news and other content.

The great fear is that paid sites will not be able to compete with the remaining free sites.   However, as more newspapers and magazines fail, readers will have fewer sources for information. This should send more ad revenue to the survivors while making their content more valuable as well.

Whether consolidation will result in fewer news sources divying up enough ad revenue for each to survive seems highly questionable.

For many years, it was considered a "truth" that consumers would not be willing to pay for television programming. That changed. The WSJ has proven that valuable, fairly exclusive content can find paying readers.

Whether GigaOm and other blog can generate content people will pay to read and what happens to "news of the day" sites remains to be seen.

Realistically, users need to start preparing for a day when the best content will come with a price attached. Advertising seems unlikely to carry the load of paying for the free media that it once supported.

This will have the effect, as paid content is delivered ad-free, of making customers more difficult for advertisers to reach. At which point, free content may become more available and a balance between paid and free will be found. Just expect more mass extinction, followed by a shift to paid content, before this occurs.

'DTXTR' Translates Teen Text into English

Wot r ur kids txting? If you're wondering - or 1dering - there's a new online translation tool that helps decipher the code.

Mobile phone maker LG Electronics MobileComm USA has launched "DTXTR," a

Web service which translates teen text speech into plain English.

Plug in text shortcuts such as OMG! or 2G2BT and get back the translation - in this case "Oh my God!" and "too good to be true."

DTXTR includes a glossary of hundreds of definitions for shorthand text phrases, abbreviations and symbols.

It also includes text tips for parents to help them "stay ahead of the curve."

DTXTR is located at lgdtxtr.com.

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